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(I.)—DUTY OF A RICH NATION TO TAKE CARE OF HER CHILDREN

BY ISAAC N. SELIGMAN,

Chairman, *pro tempore*, National Child Labor Committee, New York City.

It is a great privilege for me formally to open these interesting sessions, and I bring to you all a message of cheer and encouragement from the East. The honor of addressing you to-day falls on my shoulders as temporary chairman.

Our Chairman, Professor Felix Adler—that valiant champion in all movements for the betterment of his fellow-beings—has been called to Berlin University, where he is now delivering a course of useful lectures. It was he who, from the very first meeting for the organization of the National Child Labor Committee, has given it its best ideals, and from him our Board of Trustees and workers throughout the several states received constantly fresh incentive and inspiration in the performance and continuance of the work. I am actively interested in many fields of social work, but I venture to say that few if any of them have afforded me keener pleasure or more thorough satisfaction than my association with the child labor movement.

It is customary in formally opening proceedings to render an account of our stewardship—what has been accomplished; what goal it was hoped to achieve; wherein obstacles have been encountered. To review the operations of last year affords a pleasing retrospect. The Committee has practically no floating debt. It has been said that it is much simpler to finance a surplus than a deficit. The Committee depends for its financial support on voluntary contributions. A dozen or more gentlemen, deeply interested, subscribe annually sums from \$100 to \$500; but the Committee depends chiefly on regular annual membership, which comprises sustaining members, persons contributing \$25 or more; and associate members, persons contributing \$2 or more. These subscribers, to the number of nearly 3000, have enrolled as annual contributors, thus manifesting their sympathy in the waging of war against the evils of child labor. I trust that all those present, and those absentees who are inter-

ested in the work of the National Child Labor Committee, will enroll themselves as members, thereby having the pleasurable satisfaction of annually contributing their mite to the saving of child life, and keeping open in this fair land of ours the door of opportunity for every child. The work of the society can be more effectively increased, and greater results can be achieved, if it could depend on an annual income of \$10,000 to \$15,000.

In surveying the work accomplished by the National Child Labor Committee, we can honestly affirm that great progress has been made. Goethe, the German poet and philosopher, laid down three axioms as a test for the value of all undertakings:

1. What does one propose doing?
2. Is it worth doing?
3. Has it been well done?

I think we may fairly claim, after you have listened to the able speakers who will address you on many interesting subjects, that you will say to yourselves, the work is worth doing, and has been well done.

The subject assigned to me this evening is a particularly agreeable one—"Duty of a Rich Nation to Take Care of Her Children." The subject is a vast one, and hours could be profitably employed in discussing this problem. What is the duty of a wealthy nation to its wards? To what extent, and in what manner, shall a nation guard its weak, sick or suffering? There may be honest differences of opinion as to the duty of the state, or the nation, or private capital being enlisted to erect hospitals, homes or institutions, but there cannot be any difference of views as to the necessity of the nation passing such laws as will protect the lives of our tender children working in any path of life. I have always maintained that in spite of the prodigality and liberality of our Government in many directions, it has been remiss in doing so little for the needy, sick and poor. The large majority of institutions throughout our land have been erected, and are maintained, by private subscriptions and endowments. In England, France and Germany, in fact, in most European countries, the asylums for the young, hospitals, convalescent homes and so on are built and are conducted more largely under supervision of the government. The public is not asked to erect or maintain such homes. In our country the majority of hospitals, convalescent homes, institutions of all

kinds, although frequently aided by state funds, must find the where-withal to subsist through private charity.

Opinions may differ as to which system is most productive of good results but it appears to me that the European system is sounder and wiser, and is less liable to cripple the usefulness of such institutions at times when the country suffers from financial disturbances. Already Germany's policy in establishing the old-age pension system has been taken up by France and England. Perhaps in time such a system will be followed in our own country.

It seems to me that it is the paramount duty of the state or nation to take care of, or aid, those who, by misfortune or accident, are disabled from earning their living. Private charity should not be continually called upon to do what is clearly the duty of the city, state or nation. There are many other directions in which private charity can be usefully dispensed if the state or city relieved the public of the financial burden of building, repairing and maintaining hospitals and institutions. We must realize that the socialistic spirit is everywhere spreading. We have lately seen in many European countries the policy adopted by the government giving work and devising undertakings for the unemployed during times of distress. Concessions are being continually made by the party in power more thoroughly to satisfy the middle and poorer community. If the government feels the necessity of giving work to the poor, is it not morally bound to maintain those unable to work? The natural liberality of the American to devote his means or private fortune to some useful end, and his prompt, chivalric and substantial answer to the appeals from the poor and needy, have apparently stifled the government's, state's or city's readiness to perform its clear duty in doing its share in proper relief. It is true that there are quite a number of people who believe that charities and relief of the aged, infirm and suffering can be more effectually managed by private charities than through the direct instrumentality of the state. I will concede that, in many instances, private management may prove more satisfactory; but the spectacle of some hospitals and institutions being forced to close their doors or restrict their usefulness from want of funds is deplorable. Such a condition of affairs cannot occur abroad under state control. However your view of the responsibility of the state for the relief or protection of the adult may differ from mine, I am satisfied that there can be no dissenting voice as to the impera-

tive duty and moral obligation of a nation, and, if rich, the greater the obligation, to guard and watch its *younger children*, and surround their tender lives with such safeguards as will better protect their health and lives, thus doing its share to enable them in time to become honest, decent and useful citizens.

Omitting from the discussion the obligation of the state, and not private charity, to erect and maintain orphan asylums, protectories for children, homes for little waifs, there is the overpowering moral duty of the state and nation to pass laws to regulate the number of hours of employment for children, say, under sixteen years of age, and to prevent them from working in occupations distinctly hurtful to their health and morals, and to prohibit absolutely any child under fourteen years of age being employed for wages. The various states, through the ministration and inspiration of the National Child Labor Committee, are actively engaged in this humane and noble task. We have now twenty-six state and local Child Labor Committees, whose efforts are co-ordinated and supplemented by our National Committee, and we are constantly receiving appeals from many states to aid them in securing better laws for the coming year. These are encouraging signs. It shows that public interest and sympathy in this great work have been awakened.

Do you realize that one in every twenty of all the children in the country from the age of ten to sixteen years is working in a factory, coal mine, trade or transportation, many of them slaving in the night in grimy workshops in big cities, deprived in most cases of elementary education, and forced in many instances to associate with vile and evil companionship? These are the crying evils which the National Child Labor Committee is trying to rectify, and these are the evils which our nation must suppress. Many difficulties are encountered in locating and ascertaining the source of the evils. The owners of factories employing child labor are, in many cases, loath to give information, and even the parents of the children working in undesirable occupations and surroundings falsify the ages of their children. It has been humorously said that a factory child passes from the age of eleven to the prescribed age of fourteen years without any due regard to the Gregorian Calendar.

The National Child Labor Committee hopes to secure, at an early session of Congress, the passage of a bill for a Federal Children's Bureau, the object of the bill being to investigate questions

of infant mortality, the birth rate, physical degeneracy, juvenile delinquency, and juvenile courts, desertion, illegitimacy, employment of children in dangerous occupations and all legislation bearing on the health, efficiency, character and training of children. This will afford the Committee and the public valuable information and ammunition to cope better with the evils of child labor.

Child labor means moral impairment and physical destruction, and it is the duty of the state to protect the tender childhood, and not allow the young lives to be sacrificed at the altar of greedy employers, or even by selfish parents. As has been nobly said: "The child means more to the community than any material gain." I firmly believe that, when we have established in *all* the states of the Union proper and restrictive laws to save child life, we shall have accomplished a great achievement. Kipling has truly said that we must teach people to live before we teach them to learn. When we, as a nation, have accomplished this beneficent end, we shall have conferred on our country a lasting blessing, and shall have left to generations to come a noble legacy, whereof we may justly feel proud. Give us your warm sympathy and active support, and we pledge you that we will not shrink or retire from the battlefield until we have won the fight.